

Welcome to Rosa Luxemburg Annual 2008 Seminar

**Rhodes University
Eden Grove
Saturday, 8 March 2008**

The Director of the Institute of Social and Economic Research, Prof. Ruiters, colleagues from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, seminar organisers, speakers, participants, colleagues from universities and other institutions and organisations, molweni, good morning.

On behalf of the academics, students and support staff of Rhodes University, welcome to Rhodes University, to iRhini/Grahamstown, to the Makana District, and the Eastern Cape; and to our international colleagues and visitors, an especially warm welcome also to South Africa.

I trust that you will enjoy a stimulating and productive two days and that you will emerge with insights and ideas of the kind that can further enhance knowledge and understanding in the areas of women's and gender rights and relations, and also help erode the powerful social structures and conditions that constitute barriers to transformation in these spheres.

For transport, logistic and costs reasons, compared to universities in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban, Rhodes scholars have to work especially hard to attract and host national and especially international conferences, workshops and seminars.

That we do so with considerable success is, I believe, testimony to the quality of our scholars, recognition of their scholarship nationally and internationally, and also acknowledgement that at Rhodes are outstanding scholars that seek to engage seriously with the challenge of advancing human and social rights through engaged and committed yet critical scholarship and also social activism.

I am extremely pleased that the Rosa Luxemburg Annual Seminar is being hosted by an institute at Rhodes University, and that we have this opportunity to partner with the Foundation that strives keep to keep alive the memory of an outstanding revolutionary who has influenced and inspired many critical scholars and activists around the world.

Those of us, who may be committed to more radical changes, to a more vigorous assertion of the values of human dignity, human rights and freedoms, of equality, non-sexism and non-racialism, to the development of an open, vibrant, democratic and inclusive culture can draw inspiration from Luxemburg.

In the conditions that we find ourselves, there can be the temptation to give up on the more just and humane society that we may seek. Yet Luxemburg provides sage guidance. A century ago she posed the question: Can we 'be against reforms? Can we counterpose the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reform' (1970:8). Her answer was an unambiguous 'Certainly not'; that 'the daily struggle for reforms...within the framework of the existing social order' is a means of working towards the 'final goal'. 'Between social reforms and (transformation) there exists an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is the means; social (transformation) its aim' (Luxemburg, 1970: 8).

This cooperation with the Foundation across continents is vital in addressing our common challenges in the epoch of globalisation, and in a context where the ideology of neo-liberalism hold powerful sway on the thinking, policies and practices of governments and institutions to the detriment of an agenda of social justice and social transformation.

It concerns me that some of universities having been sites of critical scholarship on crucial aspects of South African society, a disinterested, critical and rigorous, yet socially committed scholarship that connected with mass

organisations, workers and rural poor, and also found expression in popular publications, that, today, when we are a constitutional democracy with an admirable Bill of Rights, there is a dearth of critical and engaged scholarship.

The truth is we are to protect our freedoms, extend and deepen rights and our democracy, and ensure that there is vibrant and civil society, scholars must return to a scholarship that is engaged as it is critical.

We need a rigorous scholarship - even if it identifies wholly or in part with the social goals of the government, the state, political parties or social movements – that freely interrogates the thinking, priorities and policies of all these actors.

The goals of our society and the means to their achievement are never settled. It is the task of critical scholarship to investigate the theoretical foundations, and the empirical analyses that define the direction our country has taken. This work could well show that today's conventional wisdoms (and their associated policies) rest on shaky foundations, with possibly profound social consequences. As Antonio Gramsci insisted, research 'must produce knowledge for politics, without cutting itself off from the objective and scientific investigation of the world'.

I very much hope that we can build a relationship with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation that can help support and give impetus to the critical scholarship that I suggest is so vital for social justice and the deepening of democracy in South Africa and elsewhere.

In closing, I wish you a very stimulating and productive conference, an enjoyable stay at Rhodes and in iRhini/Grahamstown, and I am confident that you will find us stimulating and hospitable hosts.